

Genetics Bldg.

June 1, 1958

Professor Curt Stern
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Dear Curt:

I hope your chromosome montage has reached you in time to be of some use. It was already in the mail when your letter arrived.

I have to say how much I appreciate your lasting efforts on behalf of my appointment at Berkeley. At the very least, I should tell you something of my immediate position, as I would not want any cross-purposes to lead you into any needless embarrassment.

may have

In a way, the Berkeley contretemps worked out just as well, as far as relieving the necessity of an impossibly difficult decision, in my own mind. (This is, of course, altogether another matter from the very unhappy question of mutual confidence between a university administration and a department). Since seeing you last, I have been actively considering another offer from Stanford, to organize a small Department of Genetics in the medical school which is moving down to the Palo Alto campus from San Francisco next year. This is still in a somewhat tentative state, with respect to finances, but most of the preliminary questions seem to be out of the way, and there should be a definite conclusion within six or eight weeks. (I know you will use a discretion apt to the circumstances in discussing the matter). Since there is a reasonable possibility that this will work out, I would not want you put yourself out on a limb with the Berkeley administration in pressing the reopening of a discussion of my appointment. However, Stanford is by no means a settled issue, and I just give you the facts for the exercise of your own judgment. I am not contemplating any action from Berkeley (in view of recent decisions!) as a factor in the present issue.

On any direct comparison of Stanford and Berkeley, there can hardly be any question which institution would stand highest in academic rank. But I think there are some compensations, particularly in the flexibility and informality of a smaller private university. A very strong factor in my present inclinations is the move of Kornberg and his entire group to constitute the Biochemistry Department, and the possibility of close collaboration with them in adjacent laboratory rooms. Also, I would hope that despite the distance, Stanford and Berkeley will contribute something to each other's intellectual environment, and that this liaison will perhaps improve somewhat especially in genetics on account of the renewed emphasis that this will receive to match what Berkeley already has had. I was particularly delighted to learn that arrangements had been concluded during the past year to allow Stanford students to attend classes at Berkeley, and vice versa, and I would hope that we might do more of this at a faculty level too.

At any rate, I do not know how we could possibly have reached a reasonable decision between the alternative possibilities of Berkeley and Stanford, not to mention the still viable one of Madison, so at least for my own peace of mind it may be as well that the question was arbitrarily simplified. All three of these institutions have so much to offer in academic life! It is hard for me to visualize where else I would want to consider working, and I just hope we can come to an early conclusion so I can get back to my proper job again.

I should wait for this before asking your advice, but there are two facets on which I would welcome it now. First, while there is still time to consider whether there are any particular cautions you would urge in respect to Stanford -- though I have to anticipate by remarking that the medical school is almost a new and untried organization, and somewhat different in spirit (and particularly in stress on medical & graduate vs. undergraduate education) from the collegiate campus. Second, if the job does work out I hope I can solicit your advice on its organization. In fact there will be a likely vacancy either here or at Stanford or both for a younger worker (say an assistant professor, conceivably associate) in mammalian genetics, along the lines, say, of Mitchison or Silvers. That is, someone who can be expected to combine sound training in (probably) mouse genetics with a research interest in genetics of somatic cells (transplantation or tissue culture). If you know of such a paragon (preferably a pair of monozygotic twins) I would appreciate hearing about him. I had had my hopes set on Atwood (though he may not seem to fit the prescription) but since he is going to Chicago, we have to redirect our interests.

As you can gather, the intended aims of Genetics at Stanford would be comparable to Medical Genetics at Wisconsin. For either institution, our thinking has been to establish a basic science department (comparable to Biochemistry), and to encourage clinical aspects (e.g. counseling) by collaborative arrangements with clinical departments, especially Pediatrics. That Department at Wisconsin is actively looking for a genetically oriented pediatrician for its staff, would prefer to find someone with a reasonable level of genetic training, but would consider leaving even that to collaboration with Medical Genetics. Have you any suggestions at this level? It is possible that a somewhat more senior position in the same area will develop at Stanford, and for this too I would appreciate any ideas that might help in formulating a recommendation there.

As may be imagined, we already knew before our symposium that there has been a dramatic growth in the interest of medical schools in genetics, so that I am sure the limiting factor now is certainly the shortage of good people, and not potential positions. It has surprised me that the Cal. medical school has not reacted more aggressively in the same direction, but perhaps I do not know all that is going on.

I passed through Berkeley a few Sundays ago, but was too pressed for time (and the occasion was not too propitious) to make many calls. I expect to be out again about the second or third week of September on NIH, perhaps other, business. (Did you know that the 'Morphology & Genetics' Study section has been split, and there is now a special section on Genetics?) We will be in Europe during August for the Microbiology Congress in Stockholm and some vacation; we may get back just in time for Montreal.

Withall the best, Yours,

Joshua Lederberg